

Preface

Writing, like public speaking ranks high on the fear list. Many fear putting their thoughts and feelings into print. Yet, far too many people just throw words out, assuming that others will understand them.

You can't do that if you're a manager because business depends on communication. An effective manager must communicate effectively. But what does that mean? Sometimes it means improving productivity on the job.

Clear communication—the expression of thoughts—improves productivity because it reduces errors. Poor communication harms productivity and efficiency. Common on-the-job errors such as poor project instructions, mediocre memos, lackluster letters, and raincheck (I'll read it later) reports illustrate poor communication at work. Communicating also means making a connection with others. And writing provides a lasting connection.

There's an old proverb that reminds us, "Words fly away; writing remains." What you put down on paper or communicate electronically may not fade away soon; those words may last far longer than you intended—and go much farther.

When you speak, the people around you know the circumstances and take them into account. Maybe you fumble for the right words. Maybe your thoughts and feelings come out in long, wandering tangents. The people around you understand. They know that you don't have the time to organize what you want to say, to choose the right words.

But when you write, you've got the time—or at least people assume you've got the time. They probably expect more of you—better organization, more careful expression. And when you write, you give them the time to read your words, over and over.

Writing can be frightening.

That's why I wrote this book and hopefully why you'll read it. It's important to write well in business. I've tried to focus on your needs, to help you write what you need to write, especially on the job.

Overview

All writing begins with the reader. **Chapter 1** emphasizes that perspective, explaining how you should try to understand the people who will read what you write. From there I move to your reasons for writing. **Chapter 2** discusses the purposes of writing and how we can pursue our purpose through a four-stage process.

The purpose of writing is to express, not to impress. Too many managers forget that basic fact of communication. They use fancy words and long, involved sentences that convey little and make the reader work hard to get at the meaning. We've all laughed at that bumper sticker that proclaims, "Eschew obfuscation." That's the focus of **Chapter 3**. It will show you how to give the most information to your readers and take the least time from them.

Chapter 4 moves into the types of business writing, how you can structure what you write to reach your reader and serve your purpose. It presents the basics of writing letters, memos, and electronic mail.

But writing is not simply a matter of using words. **Chapter 5** shows how we can put more power into what we write by knowing how to use visuals, white space, and headings. The way we frame and complement our words can do a lot to grab attention and guide our readers. **Chapter 6** continues the discussion of attracting and holding the readers. It focuses on two

areas that cause the most problems for many people when they write: how to start and how to stop.

Chapter 7 returns to the message with which the book begins: write for your readers. Managers often have to explain their ideas—to their employees, to peers, to supervisors and senior management, to vendors and customers. To do this effectively, you need to know about avoiding assumptions and gaining perspective, about writing descriptions that people can understand and instructions that they can follow.

Chapters 8 and 9 cover two purposes presented in Chapter 2, difficult situations for most managers. In Chapter 8 you'll learn how to deal with tough situations, whether you're announcing bad news or reacting to a challenge, and how to find the positives in negative circumstances. Chapter 9 will help you become more effective at persuading people, whether you're trying to win over a vendor or a customer or sell a proposal to top management.

Chapter 10, the final chapter, shows how to write reports, from the occasional report through activity reports and status or progress reports to the formal report. Maybe you write dozens of reports every year. This chapter will help you gain better results with less effort. Maybe you write only one report a year. Why not make it great? (And this chapter may help you understand how and why you should seize any chance to write a report.)

I end this book with two appendices. **Appendix A** presents my top ten tips for writing well in business. You could actually begin by reading this appendix—if you're in a hurry to improve your writing. If you start there, I believe you'll want to read the entire book. Then, in **Appendix B**, you'll find a quick reference to rules and recommendations for writing effectively. You can find many books about writing. What's the best book? It's whatever book helps you the most to write effectively. I sincerely hope that it's the book you now hold in your hand.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly person-to-person style. The chapters are short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous boxes designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.



These boxes do just what they say: give you tips and tactics for being smart in creating your written documents.



These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong in composing letters, memos, and reports.



Here you'll find how-to hints to prepare effective documents.



Every subject has its special jargon and terms. These boxes provide definitions of various communication concepts.



Want to know how others do it? These boxes provide case studies that show effective writing in action.



Here you'll find specific procedures you can follow to make it easier to plan and execute your writing on the job.



How can you make sure you won't make a mistake? You can't, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility.